

Observing Cloud Type

There are four descriptive terms for the various types of clouds:

CIRRO or high clouds

ALTO or middle clouds

CUMULUS or white puffy clouds

STRATUS or layered clouds

The following ten types of clouds, taken from the above terms, are to be used when reporting the cloud type for your area:

High Clouds



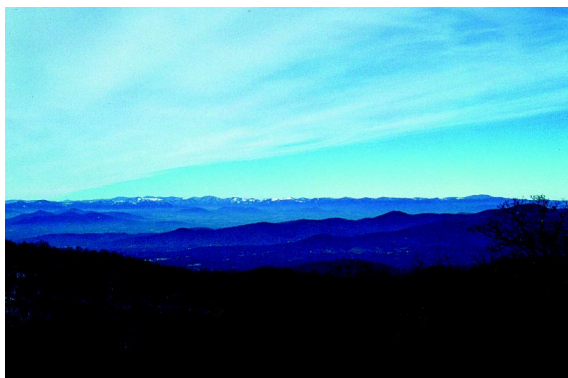
Cirrus

These clouds look like white delicate feathers. They are generally white wispy forms.



Cirrocumulus

These clouds are thin white layers with a texture giving them the look of patches of cotton or ripples without shadows. They contain very cold water droplets.



Cirrostratus

These clouds are a thin, transparent, whitish layer made up of ice crystals. They may totally or partly cover the sky and could possibly create a halo appearance around the sun.

Middle Clouds



Altostratus

These clouds form a bluish or greyish veil that totally or partially covers the sky. The light of the sun can be seen through them but there is no halo effect.



Altocumulus

These clouds look like waves of the sea with white and grey coloring and shadows. They contain mostly water droplets or ice crystals.

Low Clouds

Stratus

These clouds are grey and lie very close to the surface of the Earth. They usually look like a sheet layer but sometimes are found in patches. They rarely produce precipitation.



Stratocumulus

These clouds are a grey or whitish color. The bases of these clouds tend to be more round than flat. They can be formed from old stratus clouds or from cumulus clouds that are spreading out. Their tops also tend to be flat.



Nimbostratus

This is a very dark and grey colored cloud layer that blots out the light of the sun. It is massive and has a continuous fall of precipitation.





Cumulus

These clouds have a flat base and a dense, mound-shaped top that resembles a large cauliflower. Where the sun hits these clouds it is a brilliant white. The base tends to be a darker color. They generally do not produce precipitation.



Cumulonimbus

These are very large, heavy, and dense clouds. They have a generally flat, dark surface with very tall and large tops like the shape of a massive mountain or anvil. These clouds are often associated with lightning, thunder and sometimes hail. They may also produce a tornado.